

13. BROAD-BILLED SANDPIPER *LIMICOLA FALCINELLUS*: AN ADDITION TO THE AVIFAUNA OF RAJASTHAN

On September 7, 2001 while driving to Longewala in the early afternoon, we found some waders on the drying Baramsar depression, Jaisalmer district, Rajasthan. We noticed some little stint *Calidris minuta*, but one bird looked quite different from the others in the group. On moving closer, we recognized the bird as a broad-billed sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*, a species we had seen at Pt. Calimere (Tamil Nadu), Jamnagar (Gulf of Kutch) and Pulicat (Andhra Pradesh) earlier. However, because of the rarity value of the bird in Rajasthan, we were very cautious and took some record shots.

In the excellent light, the bird was clearly identifiable as a Broad-billed Sandpiper by the characteristic dunlin-like bill with a kink towards the tip, the snipe-like pattern of the upperparts, white belly and flanks and double white eyebrow. However, compared to the illustrations in Hayman *et al.* (1986), Beaman and Madge (1998) and Svensson *et al.* (1999) the juvenile was interesting in having only a hint of streaks on the breast. The ear coverts, neck side, chin and throat were as white as its belly and flanks. The 'lower' supercilium looked exceptionally broad and eye stripe was very faint.

Broad-billed Sandpiper is a "winter visitor to the seaboard of both Pakistan, India, Ceylon Andaman and Nicobar Islands" and "recorded less commonly in Bihar, Delhi and elsewhere - presumably on passage" (Ali and Ripley 1980). Kazmierczak and van Perlo (2000) recorded only eight inland records from the Indian subcontinent till 1999. To the best of our knowledge, the species has not been recorded in Rajasthan, except for the six recent records, including a total

of twelve birds from five localities:

1999 March 7, two adults, Kochia ki Dhani, Sambhar Lake.

2001 September 1, two adults, between Sam and Jaisalmer on a roadside depression.

2001 September 19, two adults and one juvenile, Phulera Lake, Jaipur district.

2001 September 19, one juvenile, Kochia ki Dhani, Sambhar Lake.

2001 November 18, three individuals at Surwal Lake, Sawai Madhopur.

2001 November 19 one individual at Choru Lake, Sawai Madhopur.

The above records indicate a clear pattern of autumn and spring migration through Rajasthan. Perhaps difficulty in identification and paucity of observers at the crucial time are the reasons for their being overlooked in inland localities.

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14. NESTING OF TERNS ON VENGURLA ROCKS, DISTRICT SINDHUDURG, MAHARASHTRA

On June 6, 2001, we visited Vengurla Rocks (16° 35'-16° 45' N and 73° 27'-73° 30' E), Taluka Vengurla, District Sindhudurg, Maharashtra to follow up the conservation action on the Indian Edible-Swiftlet *Collocalia unicolor*.

This was the first visit to the Rocks in monsoon, the breeding season of the terns. All previous visits were made during the non-breeding season (Abdulali 1940, 1942, 1983). Madsen (1988) had observed *Sterna bergii*, *S. fuscata*, *S. repressa* and *S. anaethetus* on the Rocks from a boat.

We sailed at 0930 hrs from Nivti harbour for the island. At 50 m from the island, we saw several terns flying above the land. We landed at Bandra Rock at 1030 hrs. Dry grass was spread all over the rock. Tern eggs were present all over the Rock. There were four tern species on Bandra Rock.

Eight hundred bridled terns *Sterna anaethetus* were seen on the Rock. Their eggs were laid all over the island, under tussocks of grass and small rocks, and on bare rock.

Most of the nests contained one egg, while two nests contained two eggs each. The eggs were creamy, stone coloured with deep brown blotches. The minimum distance between two nests was 0.43 m. A male and female were seen in courtship display. They caught each other by the bill and the male walked twice in a semi-circle in front of the female.

Three hundred Large Crested Terns *Sterna bergii* were seen on the southern side on bare rock. Seventeen eggs were seen on bare rock and two on open ground in shallow scrapes. The creamy white eggs, blotched with deep brown and brownish scrawls at the broad end, and bigger than that of *Sterna anaethetus*, were being incubated.

Five Lesser Crested Terns *Sterna bengalensis* were seen in a flock of Large Crested Terns. One pair of Roseate Terns *Sterna dougallii* were seen on the rock in courtship display. At 1900 hrs, 150 Roseate Terns in scattered flocks arrived from the old lighthouse and gathered on the western side of

the rock for rest. The small, noisy flocks kept flying and landing for 30 minutes.

A Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* was also seen feeding amongst a group of Large Crested Terns. In the evening, 400 Blue Rock Pigeons *Columba livia* landed in small flocks. One White-bellied Sea-eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster* was also seen sailing over the island.

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15. COMMON HOOPOE (*UPUPA EPOPS*) FEEDING ON PRINIA (*PRINIA* SP.) CORPSE

On October 22, 2001, while traveling from Shahada to Ranipur, Nandurbar district, Maharashtra, at about 1400 hrs, I observed a Common Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*) on the metalled road. As we passed by, I noticed that it was feeding on a Prinia (*Prinia* sp.) that was probably hit by a vehicle. Its belly was open and the intestines were hanging out; one eye too was hanging out of the socket.

As we approached, the hoopoe flew to a nearby tree. I took the Prinia with me for identification. As I returned to the vehicle, the Common Hoopoe came back and started picking up the scraps of meat on the road.

According to Ali and Ripley (1983), the Common Hoopoe is strictly an insectivorous bird. However, it has been reported feeding on lizards, frogs and toads, and exceptionally on birds' eggs (Cramp 1985), but I could not find any reference to a Common Hoopoe feeding on a bird carcass. This could be an opportunistic meal.

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16. INDIAN PITTA *PITTA BRACHYURA* IN THE THAR DESERT

Balsamand Lake lies at the foot of the low hills north of Jodhpur (25° 6'-27° 1' E to 71° 9'-74° 1' N). It commands a view of a garden on the slopes still owned by the erstwhile Maharaja of Jodhpur. I was given the opportunity of studying the fauna of this ancient lake constructed in 1159 AD. A dam was constructed here in 1873 to 1895 by Maharaja Jaswant

Singhji II. There are a number of large trees of *Ficus benghalensis*, *F. religiosa*, *Azadirachta indica*, *Terminalia arjuna*, *Syzygium cumini*, *Mangifera indica*, *Aegle marmelos*, *Salvadora oleoides* and *Dalbergia latifolia*.

The first thing I saw was hundreds of fruit bats *Pteropus giganteus* clinging to a group of Banyan trees on the overflow